

ARTHUR RANSOME

RUSSIA IN 1919



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RUSSIA IN 1919

BY
ARTHUR RANSOME



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

On August 27, 1914, in London, I made this note in a memorandum book: "Met Arthur Ransome at ——'s; discussed a book on the Russian's relation to the war in the light of psychological background—folklore." The book was not written but the idea that instinctively came to him pervades his every utterance on things Russian.

The versatile man who commands more than respect as the biographer of Poe and Wilde; as the translator of and commentator on Rémy de Gourmont; as a folklorist, has shown himself to be consecrated to the truth. The document that Mr. Ransome hurried out of Russia in the early days of the Soviet government (printed in the *New Republic* and then widely circulated as a pamphlet), was the first notable appeal from a non-Russian to the American people for fair play in a crisis understood then even less than now.

The British *Who's Who*—that Almanach de Gotha of people who do things or choose their parents wisely—tells us that Mr. Ransome's recreations are "walking, smoking, fairy stories." It is, perhaps, his intimacy with the last named that enables him to distinguish between myth and fact and that makes his activity as an observer and recorder so valuable in a day of bewilderment and betrayal.

B. W. H.

INTRODUCTION

I AM well aware that there is material in this book which will be misused by fools both white and red. That is not my fault. My object has been narrowly limited. I have tried by means of a bald record of conversations and things seen, to provide material for those who wish to know what is being done and thought in Moscow at the present time, and demand something more to go upon than secondhand reports of wholly irrelevant atrocities committed by either one side or the other, and often by neither one side nor the other, but by irresponsible scoundrels who, in the natural turmoil of the greatest convulsion in the history of our civilization, escape temporarily here and there from any kind of control.

The book is in no sense of the word propaganda. For propaganda, for the defence or attack of the Communist position, is needed a knowledge of economics, both from the capitalist and socialist standpoints, to which I cannot pretend.

Very many times during the revolution it has seemed to me a tragedy that no Englishman properly equipped in this way was in Russia studying the gigantic experiment which, as a country, we are allowing to pass abused but not examined. I did my best. I got, I think I may say, as near as any foreigner who was not a Communist could get to what was going on. But I never lost the bitter feeling that the opportunities of study which I made for myself were wasted, because I could not hand them on to some other Englishman, whose education and training would have enabled him to make a better, a fuller use of them. Nor would it have been difficult for such a man to get the opportunities which were given to me when, by sheer persistence in enquiry, I had overcome the hostility which I at first encountered as the correspondent of a "bourgeois" newspaper. Such a man could be in Russia now, for the Communists do not regard war as we regard it. The Germans would hardly have allowed an Allied Commission to come to Berlin a year ago to investigate the nature and working of the Autocracy. The Russians, on the other hand, immediately

agreed to the suggestion of the Berne Conference that they should admit a party of socialists, the majority of whom, as they well knew, had already expressed condemnation of them. Further, in agreeing to this, they added that they would as willingly admit a committee of enquiry sent by any of the "bourgeois" governments actually at war with them.

I am sure that there will be many in England who will understand much better than I the drudgery of the revolution which is in this book very imperfectly suggested. I repeat that it is not my fault that they must make do with the eyes and ears of an ignorant observer. No doubt I have not asked the questions they would have asked, and have thought interesting and novel much which they would have taken for granted.

The book has no particular form, other than that given it by a more or less accurate adherence to chronology in setting down things seen and heard. It is far too incomplete to allow me to call it a Journal. I think I could have made it twice as long without repetitions, and I am not at all sure that in choosing in a hurry between

this and that I did not omit much which could with advantage be substituted for what is here set down. There is nothing here of my talk with the English soldier prisoners and nothing of my visit to the officers confined in the Butyrka Gaol. There is nothing of the plagues of typhus and influenza, or of the desperate situation of a people thus visited and unable to procure from abroad the simplest drugs which they cannot manufacture at home or even the anaesthetics necessary for their wounded on every frontier of their country. I forgot to describe the ballet which I saw a few days before leaving. I have said nothing of the talk I had with Eliava concerning the Russian plans for the future of Turkestan. I could think of a score of other omissions. Judging from what I have read since my return from Russia, I imagine people will find my book very poor in the matter of Terrors. There is nothing here of the Red Terror, or of any of the Terrors on the other side. But for its poverty in atrocities my book will be blamed only by fanatics, since they alone desire proofs of past Terrors as justification for new ones.

On reading my manuscript through, I find it quite surprisingly dull. The one thing that I should have liked to transmit through it seems somehow to have slipped away. I should have liked to explain what was the appeal of the revolution to men like Colonel Robins and myself, both of us men far removed in origin and upbringing from the revolutionary and socialist movements in our own countries. Of course no one who was able, as we were able, to watch the men of the revolution at close quarters could believe for a moment that they were the mere paid agents of the very power which more than all others represented the stronghold they had set out to destroy. We had the knowledge of the injustice being done to these men to urge us in their defence. But there was more in it than that. There was the feeling, from which we could never escape, of the creative effort of the revolution. There was the thing that distinguishes the creative from other artists, the living, vivifying expression of something hitherto hidden in the consciousness of humanity. If this book were to be an accurate record of my own impressions, all the drudgery,

gossip, quarrels, arguments, events and experiences it contains would have to be set against a background of that extraordinary vitality which obstinately persists in Moscow even in these dark days of discomfort, disillusion, pestilence, starvation and unwanted war.

ARTHUR RANSOME.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
TO PETROGRAD .	1
SMOLNI .	13
PETROGRAD TO MOSCOW	20
FIRST DAYS IN MOSCOW	25
THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON THE REPLY TO THE PRINKIPO PROPOSAL	44
KAMENEV AND THE MOSCOW SOVIET	64
AN EX-CAPITALIST .	71
A THEORIST OF REVOLUTION .	80
EFFECTS OF ISOLATION	85
AN EVENING AT THE OPERA	88
THE COMMITTEE OF STATE CONSTRUCTIONS	95
THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND THE TERROR .	108
NOTES OF CONVERSATIONS WITH LENIN .	117
THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF PUBLIC ECONOMY .	124
THE RACE WITH RUIN	132
A PLAY OF CHEKHOV .	139
THE CENTRO-TEXTILE . .	143
MODIFICATION IN THE AGRARIAN PROGRAMME .	151
FOREIGN TRADE AND MUNITIONS OF WAR .	153

	PAGE
THE PROPOSED DELEGATION FROM BERNE . . .	156
THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON THE RIVAL PARTIES	161
COMMISSARIAT OF LABOUR	170
EDUCATION	179
A BOLSHEVIK FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY . .	189
DIGRESSION	192
THE OPPOSITION	194
THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL	213
LAST TALK WITH LENIN	224
THE JOURNEY OUT	231

RUSSIA IN 1919

TO PETROGRAD

ON January 30 a party of four newspaper correspondents, two Norwegians, a Swede and myself, left Stockholm to go into Russia. We travelled with the members of the Soviet Government's Legation, headed by Vorovsky and Litvinov, who were going home after the breaking off of official relations by Sweden. Some months earlier I had got leave from the Bolsheviks to go into Russia to get further material for my history of the revolution, but at the last moment there was opposition and it seemed likely that I should be refused permission. Fortunately, however, a copy of the *Morning Post* reached Stockholm, containing a report of a lecture by Mr. Lockhart in which he had said that as I had been out of Russia for six months I had no right to speak of conditions there.

Armed with this I argued that it would be very unfair if I were not allowed to come and see things for myself. I had no further difficulties.

We crossed by boat to Abo, grinding our way through the ice, and then travelled by rail to the Russian frontier, taking several days over the journey owing to delays variously explained by the Finnish authorities. We were told that the Russian White Guards had planned an attack on the train. Litvinov, half-smiling, wondered if they were purposely giving time to the White Guards to organize such an attack. Several nervous folk inclined to that opinion. But at Viborg we were told that there were grave disorders in Petrograd and that the Finns did not wish to fling us into the middle of a scrimmage. Then someone obtained a newspaper and we read a detailed account of what was happening. This account was, as I learnt on my return, duly telegraphed to England like much other news of a similar character. There had been a serious revolt in Petrograd. The Semenovskiy regiment had gone over to the mutineers, who had seized the town. The Government, however, had escaped to Kronstadt,

whence they were bombarding Petrograd with naval guns.

This sounded fairly lively, but there was nothing to be done, so we finished up the chess tournament we had begun on the boat. An Esthonian won it, and I was second, by reason of a lucky win over Litvinov, who is really a better player. By Sunday night we reached Terijoki and on Monday moved slowly to the frontier of Finland close to Bieloostrov. A squad of Finnish soldiers was waiting, excluding everybody from the station and seeing that no dangerous revolutionary should break away on Finnish territory. There were no horses, but three hand sledges were brought, and we piled the luggage on them, and then set off to walk to the frontier duly convoyed by the Finns. A Finnish lieutenant walked at the head of the procession, chatting good-humouredly in Swedish and German, much as a man might think it worth while to be kind to a crowd of unfortunates just about to be flung into a boiling cauldron. We walked a few hundred yards along the line and then turned into a road deep in snow through a little bare wood, and so down to the little wooden

bridge over the narrow frozen stream that separates Finland from Russia. The bridge, not twenty yards across, has a toll bar at each end, two sentry boxes and two sentries. On the Russian side the bar was the familiar black and white of the old Russian Empire, with a sentry box to match. The Finns seemingly had not yet had time to paint their bar and box.

The Finns lifted their toll bar, and the Finnish officers leading our escort walked solemnly to the middle of the bridge. Then the luggage was dumped there, while we stood watching the trembling of the rickety little bridge under the weight of our belongings, for we were all taking in with us as much food as we decently could. We were none of us allowed on the bridge until an officer and a few men had come down to meet us on the Russian side. Only little Nina, Vorovsky's daughter, about ten years old, chattering Swedish with the Finns, got leave from them, and shyly, step by step, went down the other side of the bridge and struck up acquaintance with the soldier of the Red Army who stood there, gun in hand, and obligingly bent to show her the

sign, set in his hat, of the crossed sickle and hammer of the Peasants' and Workmen's Republic. At last the Finnish lieutenant took the list of his prisoners and called out the names "Vorovsky, wife and one bairn," looking laughingly over his shoulder at Nina flirting with the sentry. Then "Litvinov," and so on through all the Russians, about thirty of them. We four visitors, Grimlund the Swede, Puntervald and Stang, the Norwegians, and I, came last. At last, after a general shout of farewell, and "Helse Finland" from Nina, the Finns turned and went back into their civilization, and we went forward into the new struggling civilization of Russia. Crossing that bridge we passed from one philosophy to another, from one extreme of the class struggle to the other, from a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The contrast was noticeable at once. On the Finnish side of the frontier we had seen the grandiose new frontier station, much larger than could possibly be needed, but quite a good expression of the spirit of the new Finland. On the Russian side we came to the same grey old

wooden station known to all passengers to and from Russia for polyglot profanity and passport difficulties. There were no porters, which was not surprising because there is barbed wire and an extremely hostile sort of neutrality along the frontier and traffic across has practically ceased. In the buffet, which was very cold, no food could be bought. The long tables once laden with caviare and other *zakuski* were bare. There was, however, a samovar, and we bought tea at sixty kopecks a glass and lumps of sugar at two roubles fifty each. We took our tea into the inner passport room, where I think a stove must have been burning the day before, and there made some sort of a meal off some of Puntervald's Swedish hard-bread. It is difficult to me to express the curious mixture of depression and exhilaration that was given to the party by this derelict starving station combined with the feeling that we were no longer under guard but could do more or less as we liked. It split the party into two factions, of which one wept while the other sang. Madame Vorovsky, who had not been in Russia since the first revolution, frankly wept, but she wept still

more in Moscow where she found that even as the wife of a high official of the Government she enjoyed no privileges which would save her from the hardships of the population. But the younger members of the party, together with Litvinov, found their spirits irrepressibly rising in spite of having no dinner. They walked about the village, played with the children, and sang, not revolutionary songs, but just jolly songs, any songs that came into their heads. When at last the train came to take us into Petrograd, and we found that the carriages were unheated, somebody got out a mandoline and we kept ourselves warm by dancing. At the same time I was sorry for the five children who were with us, knowing that a country simultaneously suffering war, blockade and revolution is not a good place for childhood. But they had caught the mood of their parents, revolutionaries going home to their revolution, and trotted excitedly up and down the carriage or anchored themselves momentarily, first on one person's knee and then on another's.

It was dusk when we reached Petrograd. The Finland Station, of course, was nearly deserted,

but here there were four porters, who charged two hundred and fifty roubles for shifting the luggage of the party from one end of the platform to the other. We ourselves loaded it into the motor lorry sent to meet us, as at Bieloostrov we had loaded it into the van. There was a long time to wait while rooms were being allotted to us in various hotels, and with several others I walked outside the station to question people about the mutiny and the bombardment of which we had heard in Finland. Nobody knew anything about it. As soon as the rooms were allotted and I knew that I had been lucky enough to get one in the Astoria, I drove off across the frozen river by the Liteini Bridge. The trams were running. The town seemed absolutely quiet, and away down the river I saw once again in the dark, which is never quite dark because of the snow, the dim shape of the fortress, and passed one by one the landmarks I had come to know so well during the last six years—the Summer Garden, the British Embassy, and the great Palace Square where I had seen armoured cars flaunting about during the July rising, soldiers camping during

the hysterical days of the Kornilov affair and, earlier, Kornilov himself reviewing the Junkers. My mind went further back to the March revolution, and saw once more the picket fire of the revolutionaries at the corner that night when the remains of the Tzar's Government were still frantically printing proclamations ordering the people to go home, at the very moment while they themselves were being besieged in the Admiralty. Then it flung itself further back still, to the day of the declaration of war, when I saw this same square filled with people, while the Tzar came out for a moment on the Palace balcony. By that time we were pulling up at the Astoria and I had to turn my mind to something else.

The Astoria is now a bare barrack of a place, but comparatively clean. During the war and the first part of the revolution it was tenanted chiefly by officers, and owing to the idiocy of a few of these at the time of the first revolution in shooting at a perfectly friendly crowd of soldiers and sailors, who came there at first with no other object than to invite the officers to join them, the place was badly smashed up in the resulting scrim-

mage. I remember with Major Scale fixing up a paper announcing the fall of Bagdad either the night this happened or perhaps the night before. People rushed up to it, thinking it some news about the revolution, and turned impatiently away. All the damage has been repaired, but the red carpets have gone, perhaps to make banners, and many of the electric lights were not burning, probably because of the shortage in electricity. I got my luggage upstairs to a very pleasant room on the fourth floor. Every floor of that hotel had its memories for me. In this room lived that brave reactionary officer who boasted that he had made a raid on the Bolsheviks and showed little Madame Kollontai's hat as a trophy. In this I used to listen to Perceval Gibbon when he was talking about how to write short stories and having influenza. There was the room where Miss Beatty used to give tea to tired revolutionaries and to still more tired enquirers into the nature of revolution while she wrote the only book that has so far appeared which gives anything like a true impressionist picture of those unforgettable days.¹ Close

¹ "The Red Heart of Russia."

by was the room where poor Denis Garstin used to talk of the hunting he would have when the war should come to an end.

I enquired for a meal, and found that no food was to be had in the hotel, but they could supply hot water. Then, to get an appetite for sleep, I went out for a short walk, though I did not much like doing so with nothing but an English passport, and with no papers to show that I had any right to be there. I had, like the other foreigners, been promised such papers but had not yet received them. I went round to the Regina, which used to be one of the best hotels in the town, but those of us who had rooms there were complaining so bitterly that I did not stay with them, but went off along the Moika to the Nevsky and so back to my own hotel. The streets, like the hotel, were only half lit, and hardly any of the houses had a lighted window. In the old sheepskin coat I had worn on the front and in my high fur hat, I felt like some ghost of the old régime visiting a town long dead. The silence and emptiness of the streets contributed to this effect. Still, the few people I met or passed were

talking cheerfully together and the rare sledges and motors had comparatively good roads, the streets being certainly better swept and cleaned than they have been since the last winter of the Russian Empire.

SMOLNI

EARLY in the morning I got tea, and a bread card on which I was given a very small allowance of brown bread, noticeably better in quality than the compound of clay and straw which made me ill in Moscow last summer. Then I went to find Litvinov, and set out with him to walk to the Smolni institute, once a school for the daughters of the aristocracy, then the headquarters of the Soviet, then the headquarters of the Soviet Government, and finally, after the Government's evacuation to Moscow, bequeathed to the Northern Commune and the Petrograd Soviet. The town, in daylight, seemed less deserted, though it was obvious that the "unloading" of the Petrograd population, which was unsuccessfully attempted during the Kerensky régime, had been accomplished to a large extent. This has been partly the result of famine and of the stoppage of fac-

tories, which in its turn is due to the impossibility of bringing fuel and raw material to Petrograd. A very large proportion of Russian factory hands have not, as in other countries, lost their connection with their native villages. There was always a considerable annual migration backwards and forwards between the villages and the town, and great numbers of workmen have gone home, carrying with them the ideas of the revolution. It should also be remembered that the bulk of the earlier formed units of the Red Army is composed of workmen from the towns who, except in the case of peasants mobilized in districts which have experienced an occupation by the counter-revolutionaries, are more determined and better understand the need for discipline than the men from the country.

The most noticeable thing in Petrograd to anyone returning after six months' absence is the complete disappearance of armed men. The town seems to have returned to a perfectly peaceable condition in the sense that the need for revolutionary patrols has gone. Soldiers walking about no longer carry their rifles, and the picturesque

figures of the revolution who wore belts of machine-gun cartridges slung about their persons have gone.

The second noticeable thing, especially in the Nevsky, which was once crowded with people too fashionably dressed, is the general lack of new clothes. I did not see anybody wearing clothes that looked less than two years old, with the exception of some officers and soldiers who are as well equipped nowadays as at the beginning of the war. Petrograd ladies were particularly fond of boots, and of boots there is an extreme shortage. I saw one young woman in a well-preserved, obviously costly fur coat, and beneath it straw shoes with linen wrappings.

We had started rather late, so we took a tram half-way up the Nevsky. The tram conductors are still women. The price of tickets has risen to a rouble, usually, I noticed, paid in stamps. It used to be ten kopecks.

The armoured car which used to stand at the entrance of Smolni has disappeared and been replaced by a horrible statue of Karl Marx, who stands, thick and heavy, on a stout pedestal, hold-

ing behind him an enormous top-hat like the muzzle of an eighteen-inch gun. The only signs of preparations for defence that remain are the pair of light field guns which, rather the worse for weather, still stand under the pillars of the portico which they would probably shake to pieces if ever they should be fired. Inside the routine was as it used to be, and when I turned down the passage to get my permit to go upstairs, I could hardly believe that I had been away for so long. The place is emptier than it was. There is not the same eager crowd of country delegates pressing up and down the corridors and collecting literature from the stalls that I used to see in the old days when the serious little workman from the Viborg side stood guard over Trotsky's door, and from the alcove with its window looking down into the great hall, the endless noise of debate rose from the Petrograd Soviet that met below.

Litvinov invited me to have dinner with the Petrograd Commissars, which I was very glad to do, partly because I was hungry and partly because I thought it would be better to meet Zinoviev thus than in any other manner, remembering how sourly

he had looked upon me earlier in the revolution. Zinoviev is a Jew, with a lot of hair, a round smooth face, and a very abrupt manner. He was against the November Revolution, but when it had been accomplished returned to his old allegiance to Lenin and, becoming President of the Northern Commune, remained in Petrograd when the Government moved to Moscow. He is neither an original thinker nor a good orator except in debate, in answering opposition, which he does with extreme skill. His nerve was badly shaken by the murders of his friends Volodarsky and Uritzky last year, and he is said to have lost his head after the attack on Lenin, to whom he is extremely devoted. I have heard many Communists attribute to this fact the excesses which followed that event in Petrograd. I have never noticed anything that would make me consider him pro-German, though of course he is pro-Marx. He has, however, a decided prejudice against the English. He was among the Communists who put difficulties in my way as a "bourgeois journalist" in the earlier days of the revolution, and I had heard that he had expressed suspicion

and disapproval of Radek's intimacy with me.

I was amused to see his face when he came in and saw me sitting at the table. Litvinov introduced me to him, very tactfully telling him of Lockhart's attack upon me, whereupon he became quite decently friendly, and said that if I could stay a few days in Petrograd on my way back from Moscow he would see that I had access to the historical material I wanted about the doings of the Petrograd Soviet during the time I had been away. I told him I was surprised to find him here and not at Kronstadt, and asked about the mutiny and the treachery of the Semenovskiy regiment. There was a shout of laughter, and Pozern explained that there was no Semenovskiy regiment in existence, and that the manufacturers of the story, every word of which was a lie, had no doubt tried to give realism to it by putting in the name of the regiment which had taken a chief part in putting down the Moscow insurrection of fourteen years ago. Pozern, a thin, bearded man, with glasses, was sitting at the other end of the table, as Military Commissar of the Northern Commune.

Dinner in Smolni was the same informal affair that it was in the old days, only with much less to eat. The Commissars, men and women, came in from their work, took their places, fed and went back to work again, Zinoviev in particular staying only a few minutes. The meal was extremely simple, soup with shreds of horse-flesh in it, very good indeed, followed by a little kasha together with small slabs of some sort of white stuff of no particular consistency or taste. Then tea and a lump of sugar. The conversation was mostly about the chances of peace, and Litvinov's rather pessimistic reports were heard with disappointment. Just as I had finished, Vorovsky, Madame Vorovsky and little Nina, together with the two Norwegians and the Swede, came in. I learnt that about half the party were going on to Moscow that night and, deciding to go with them, hurried off to the hotel.

PETROGRAD TO MOSCOW

THERE was, of course, a dreadful scrimmage about getting away. Several people were not ready at the last minute. Only one motor was obtainable for nine persons with their light luggage, and a motor lorry for the heavy things. I chose to travel on the lorry with the luggage and had a fine bumpity drive to the station, reminding me of similar though livelier experiences in the earlier days of the revolution when lorries were used for the transport of machine guns, red guards, orators, enthusiasts of all kinds, and any stray persons who happened to clamber on.

At the Nikolai Station we found perfect order until we got into our wagon, an old third-class wagon, in which a certain number of places which one of the party had reserved had been occupied by people who had no right to be there. Even this difficulty was smoothed out in a manner that

would have been impossible a year or even six months ago.

The wagon was divided by a door in the middle. There were open coupés and side seats which became plank beds when necessary. We slept in three tiers on the bare boards. I had a very decent place on the second tier, and, by a bit of good luck, the topmost bench over my head was occupied only by luggage, which gave me room to climb up there and sit more or less upright under the roof with my legs dangling above the general tumult of mothers, babies, and Bolsheviki below. At each station at which the train stopped there was a general procession backwards and forwards through the wagon. Everybody who had a kettle or a coffee-pot or a tin can, or even an empty meat tin, crowded through the carriage and out to get boiling water. I had nothing but a couple of thermos flasks, but with these I joined the others. From every carriage on the train people poured out and hurried to the taps. No one controlled the taps but, with the instinct for co-operation for which Russians are remarkable, people formed themselves automatically into queues, and by the

time the train started again everybody was back in his place and ready for a general tea-drinking. This performance was repeated again and again throughout the night. People dozed off to sleep, woke up, drank more tea, and joined in the various conversations that went on in different parts of the carriage. Up aloft, I listened first to one and then to another. Some were grumbling at the price of food. Others were puzzling why other nations insisted on being at war with them. One man said he was a co-operator who had come by roundabout ways from Archangel, and describing the discontent there, told a story which I give as an illustration of the sort of thing that is being said in Russia by non-Bolsheviks. This man, in spite of the presence of many Communists in the carriage, did not disguise his hostility to their theories and practice, and none the less told this story. He said that some of the Russian troops in the Archangel district refused to go to the front. Their commanders, unable to compel them, resigned and were replaced by others who, since the men persisted in refusal, appealed for help. The barracks, so he said, were then surrounded by

American troops, and the Russians, who had refused to go to the front to fire on other Russians, were given the choice, either that every tenth man should be shot, or that they should give up their ringleaders. The ringleaders, twelve in number, were given up, were made to dig their own graves, and shot. The whole story may well be Archangel gossip. If so, as a specimen of such gossip, it is not without significance. In another part of the carriage an argument on the true nature of selfishness caused some heat because the disputants insisted on drawing their illustrations from each other's conduct. Then there was the diversion of a swearing match at a wayside station between the conductor and some one who tried to get into this carriage and should have got into another. Both were fluent and imaginative swearers, and even the man from Archangel stopped talking to listen to them. One, I remember, prayed vehemently that the other's hand might fly off, and the other, not to be outdone, retorted with a similar prayer with regard to the former's head. In England the dispute, which became very fierce indeed, would have ended in

assault, but here it ended in nothing but the collection on the platform of a small crowd of experts in bad language who applauded verbal hits with impartiality and enthusiasm.

At last I tried to sleep, but the atmosphere in the carriage, of smoke, babies, stale clothes, and the peculiar smell of the Russian peasantry which no one who has known it can forget, made sleep impossible. But I travelled fairly comfortably, resolutely shutting my ears to the talk, thinking of fishing in England, and shifting from one bone to another as each ached in turn from contact with the plank on which I lay.

FIRST DAYS IN MOSCOW

It was a rare cold day when I struggled through the crowd out of the station in Moscow, and began fighting with the sledge-drivers who asked a hundred roubles to take me to the Metropole. I remembered coming here a year ago with Colonel Robins, when we made ten roubles a limit for the journey and often travelled for eight. To-day, after heated bargaining, I got carried with no luggage but a typewriter for fifty roubles. The streets were white with deep snow, less well cleaned than the Petrograd streets of this year but better cleaned than the Moscow streets of last year. The tramways were running. There seemed to be at least as many sledges as usual, and the horses were in slightly better condition than last summer when they were scarcely able to drag themselves along. I asked the reason of the improvement, and the driver told me the horses

were now rationed like human beings, and all got a small allowance of oats. There were crowds of people about, but the numbers of closed shops were very depressing. I did not then know that this was due to the nationalization of trade and a sort of general stock-taking, the object of which was to prevent profiteering in manufactured goods, etc., of which there were not enough to go round. Before I left many shops were being reopened as national concerns, like our own National Kitchens. Thus, one would see over a shop the inscription, "The 5th Boot Store of the Moscow Soviet" or "The 3rd Clothing Store of the Moscow Soviet" or "The 11th Book Shop." It had been found that speculators bought, for example, half a dozen overcoats, and sold them to the highest bidders, thus giving the rich an advantage over the poor. Now if a man needs a new suit he has to go in his rags to his House Committee, and satisfy them that he really needs a new suit for himself. He is then given the right to buy a suit. In this way an attempt is made to prevent speculation and to ensure a more or less equitable distribution of the inadequate stocks. My greatest surprise was

given me by the Metropole itself, because the old wounds of the revolution, which were left unhealed all last summer, the shell-holes and bullet splashes which marked it when I was here before, have been repaired.

Litvinov had given me a letter to Karakhan of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, asking him to help me in getting a room. I found him at the Metropole, still smoking as it were the cigar of six months ago. Karakhan, a handsome Armenian, elegantly bearded and moustached, once irreverently described by Radek as "a donkey of classical beauty," who has consistently used such influence as he has in favour of moderation and agreement with the Allies, greeted me very cordially, and told me that the foreign visitors were to be housed in the Kremlin. I told him I should much prefer to live in an hotel in the ordinary way, and he at once set about getting a room for me. This was no easy business, though he obtained an authorization from Sverdlov, president of the executive committee, for me to live where I wished, in the Metropole or the National, which are mostly reserved for Soviet delegates, officials

and members of the Executive Committee. Both were full, and he finally got me a room in the old Loskutnaya Hotel, now the Red Fleet, partially reserved for sailor delegates and members of the Naval College.

Rooms are distributed on much the same plan as clothes. Housing is considered a State monopoly, and a general census of housing accommodation has been taken. In every district there are housing committees to whom people wanting rooms apply. They work on the rough and ready theory that until every man has one room no one has a right to two. An Englishman acting as manager of works near Moscow told me that part of his house had been allotted to workers in his factory, who, however, were living with him amicably, and had, I think, allowed him to choose which rooms he should concede. This plan has, of course, proved very hard on house-owners, and in some cases the new tenants have made a horrible mess of the houses, as might, indeed, have been expected, seeing that they had previously been of those who had suffered directly from the decivilizing influences of overcrowding. After

talking for some time we went round the corner to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, where we found Chicherin who, I thought, had aged a good deal and was (though this was perhaps his manner) less cordial than Karakhan. He asked about England, and I told him Litvinov knew more about that than I, since he had been there more recently. He asked what I thought would be the effect of his Note with detailed terms published that day. I told him that Litvinov, in an interview which I had telegraphed, had mentioned somewhat similar terms some time before, and that personally I doubted whether the Allies would at present come to any agreement with the Soviet Government, but that, if the Soviet Government lasted, my personal opinion was that the commercial isolation of so vast a country as Russia could hardly be prolonged indefinitely on that account alone. (For the general attitude to that Note, see page 44.)

I then met Voznesensky (Left Social Revolutionary), of the Oriental Department, bursting with criticism of the Bolshevik attitude towards his party. He secured a ticket for me to get din-

ner in the Metropole. This ticket I had to surrender when I got a room in the National. The dinner consisted of a plate of soup, and a very small portion of something else. There are National Kitchens in different parts of the town supplying similar meals. Glasses of weak tea were sold at 30 kopecks each, without sugar. My sister had sent me a small bottle of saccharine just before I left Stockholm, and it was pathetic to see the childish delight with which some of my friends drank glasses of sweetened tea.

From the Metropole I went to the Red Fleet to get my room fixed up. Six months ago there were comparatively clean rooms here, but the sailors have demoralized the hotel and its filth is indescribable. There was no heating and very little light. A samovar left after the departure of the last visitor was standing on the table, together with some dirty curl-papers and other rubbish. I got the waiter to clean up more or less, and ordered a new samovar. He could not supply spoon, knife, or fork, and only with great difficulty was persuaded to lend me glasses.

The telephone, however, was working, and after

tea I got into touch with Madame Radek, who had moved from the Metropole into the Kremlin. I had not yet got a pass to the Kremlin, so she arranged to meet me and get a pass for me from the Commandant. I walked through the snow to the white gate at the end of the bridge which leads over the garden up a steep incline to the Kremlin. Here a fire of logs was burning, and three soldiers were sitting around it. Madame Radek was waiting for me, warming her hands at the fire, and we went together into the citadel of the republic.

A meeting of the People's Commissars was going on in the Kremlin, and on an open space under the ancient churches were a number of motors black on the snow. We turned to the right down the Dvortzovaya street, between the old Cavalier House and the Potyeshny Palace, and went in through a door under the archway that crosses the road, and up some dark flights of stairs to a part of the building that used, I think, to be called the Pleasure Palace. Here, in a wonderful old room, hung with Gobelins tapestries absolutely undamaged by the revolution, and furnished with carved

chairs, we found the most incongruous figure of the old Swiss internationalist, Karl Moor, who talked with affection of Keir Hardie and of Hyndman, "in the days when he was a socialist," and was disappointed to find that I knew so little about them. Madame Radek asked, of course, for the latest news of Radek, and I told her that I had read in the Stockholm papers that he had gone to Brunswick, and was said to be living in the palace there.¹ She feared he might have been in Bremen when that town was taken by the Government troops, and did not believe he would ever get back to Russia. She asked me, did I not feel already (as indeed I did) the enormous difference which the last six months had made in strengthening the revolution. I asked after old acquaintances, and learnt that Pyatakov, who, when I last saw him, was praying that the Allies should give him machine rifles to use against the Germans in the Ukraine, had been the first President of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, but had since been replaced by Rakovsky. It had been

¹ It was not till later that we learned he had returned to Berlin, been arrested, and put in prison.

found that the views of the Pyatakov government were further left than those of its supporters, and so Pyatakov had given way to Rakovsky who was better able to conduct a more moderate policy. The Republic had been proclaimed in Kharkov, but at that time Kiev was still in the hands of the Directorate.

That night my room in the Red Fleet was so cold that I went to bed in a sheepskin coat under rugs and all possible bedclothes with a mattress on the top. Even so I slept very badly.

The next day I spent in vain wrestlings to get a better room. Walking about the town I found it dotted with revolutionary sculptures, some very bad, others interesting, all done in some haste and set up for the celebrations of the anniversary of the revolution last November. The painters also had been turned loose to do what they could with the hoardings, and though the weather had damaged many of their pictures, enough was left to show what an extraordinary carnival that had been. Where a hoarding ran along the front of a house being repaired the painters had used the whole of it as a vast canvas on which they had

painted huge symbolic pictures of the revolution. A whole block in the Tverskaya was so decorated. Best, I think, were the row of wooden booths almost opposite the Hotel National in the Okhotnia Ryadi. These had been painted by the futurists or kindred artists, and made a really delightful effect, their bright colours and naif patterns seeming so natural to Moscow that I found myself wondering how it was that they had never been so painted before. They used to be a uniform dull yellow. Now, in clear primary colours, blue, red, yellow, with rough flower designs, on white and chequered back-grounds, with the masses of snow in the road before them, and bright-kerchiefed women and peasants in ruddy sheepskin coats passing by, they seemed less like futurist paintings than like some traditional survival, linking new Moscow with the Middle Ages. It is perhaps interesting to note that certain staid purists in the Moscow Soviet raised a protest while I was there against the license given to the futurists to spread themselves about the town, and demanded that the art of the revolution should be more comprehensible and less violent. These

criticisms, however, did not apply to the row of booths which were a pleasure to me every time I passed them.

In the evening I went to see Reinstein in the National. Reinstein is a little old grandfather, a member of the American Socialist Labour Party, who was tireless in helping the Americans last year, and is a prodigy of knowledge about the revolution. He must be nearly seventy, never misses a meeting of the Moscow Soviet or the Executive Committee, gets up at seven in the morning, and goes from one end of Moscow to the other to lecture to the young men in training as officers for the Soviet Army, more or less controls the English soldier war prisoners, about whose Bolshevism he is extremely pessimistic, and enjoys an official position as head of the quite futile department which prints hundred-weight upon hundred-weight of propaganda in English, none of which by any chance ever reaches these shores. He was terribly disappointed that I had brought no American papers with me. He complained of the lack of transport, a complaint which I think I must have heard at least three times a day from different

people the whole time I was in Moscow. Politically, he thought, the position could not be better, though economically it was very bad. When they had corn, as it were, in sight, they could not get it to the towns for lack of locomotives. These economic difficulties were bound to react sooner or later on the political position.

He talked about the English prisoners. The men are brought to Moscow, where they are given special passports and are allowed to go anywhere they like about the town without convoy of any kind. I asked about the officers, and he said that they were in prison but given everything possible, a member of the International Red Cross, who worked with the Americans when they were here, visiting them regularly and taking in parcels for them. He told me that on hearing in Moscow that some sort of fraternization was going on on the Archangel front, he had hurried off there with two prisoners, one English and one American. With some difficulty a meeting was arranged. Two officers and a sergeant from the Allied side and Reinstein and these two prisoners from the Russian, met on a bridge midway between the op-

posing lines. The conversation seemed to have been mostly an argument about working-class conditions in America, together with reasons why the Allies should go home and leave Russia alone. Finally the Allied representatives (I fancy Americans) asked Reinstein to come with them to Archangel and state his case, promising him safe conduct there and back. By this time two Russians had joined the group, and one of them offered his back as a desk, on which a safe-conduct for Reinstein was written. Reinstein, who showed me the safe-conduct, doubted its validity, and said that anyhow he could not have used it without instructions from Moscow. When it grew dusk they prepared to separate. The officers said to the prisoners, "What? Aren't you coming back with us?" The two shook their heads decidedly, and said, "No, thank you."

I learnt that some one was leaving the National next day to go to Kharkov, so that I should probably be able to get a room. After drinking tea with Reinstein till pretty late, I went home, burrowed into a mountain of all sorts of clothes, and slept a little.

In the morning I succeeded in making out my claim to the room at the National, which turned out to be a very pleasant one, next door to the kitchen and therefore quite decently warm. I wasted a lot of time getting my stuff across. Transport from one hotel to the other, though the distance is not a hundred yards, cost forty roubles. I got things straightened out, bought some books, and prepared a list of the material needed and the people I wanted to see.

The room was perfectly clean. The chambermaid who came in to tidy up quite evidently took a pride in doing her work properly, and protested against my throwing matches on the floor. She said she had been in the hotel since it was opened. I asked her how she liked the new régime. She replied that there was not enough to eat, but that she felt freer.

In the afternoon I went downstairs to the main kitchens of the hotel, where there is a permanent supply of hot water. One enormous kitchen is set apart for the use of people living in the hotel. Here I found a crowd of people, all using different parts of the huge stove. There was an old grey-

haired Cossack, with a scarlet tunic under his black, wide-skirted, narrow-waisted coat, decorated in the Cossack fashion with ornamental cartridges. He was warming his soup, side by side with a little Jewess making potato-cakes. A spectacled elderly member of the Executive Committee was busy doing something with a little bit of meat. Two little girls were boiling potatoes in old tin cans. In another room set apart for washing a sturdy little long-haired revolutionary was cleaning a shirt. A woman with her hair done up in a blue handkerchief was very carefully ironing a blouse. Another was busy stewing sheets, or something of that kind, in a big cauldron. And all the time people from all parts of the hotel were coming with their pitchers and pans, from fine copper kettles to disreputable empty meat tins, to fetch hot water for tea. At the other side of the corridor was a sort of counter in front of a long window opening into yet another kitchen. Here there was a row of people waiting with their own saucepans and plates, getting their dinner allowances of soup and meat in exchange for tickets. I was told that people thought they got slightly more if they took

their food in this way straight from the kitchen to their own rooms instead of being served in the restaurant. But I watched closely, and decided it was only superstition. Besides, I had not got a saucepan.

On paying for my room at the beginning of the week I was given a card with the days of the week printed along its edge. This card gave me the right to buy one dinner daily, and when I bought it that day of the week was snipped off the card so that I could not buy another. The meal consisted of a plate of very good soup, together with a second course of a scrap of meat or fish. The price of the meal varied between five and seven roubles.

One could obtain this meal any time between two and seven. Living hungrily through the morning, at two o'clock I used to experience definite relief in the knowledge that now at any moment I could have my meal. Feeling in this way less hungry, I used then to postpone it hour by hour, and actually dined about five or six o'clock. Thinking that I might indeed have been specially favoured I made investigations, and found that

the dinners supplied at the public feeding houses (the equivalent of our national kitchens) were of precisely the same size and character, any difference between the meals depending not on the food but on the cook.

A kind of rough and ready co-operative system also obtained. One day there was a notice on the stairs that those who wanted could get one pot of jam apiece by applying to the provisioning committee of the hotel. I got a pot of jam in this way, and on a later occasion a small quantity of Ukrainian sausage.

Besides the food obtainable on cards it was possible to buy, at ruinous prices, food from speculators, and an idea of the difference in the prices may be obtained from the following examples: Bread is one rouble 20 kopecks per pound by card and 15 to 20 roubles per pound from the speculators. Sugar is 12 roubles per pound by card, and never less than 50 roubles per pound in the open market. It is obvious that abolition of the card system would mean that the rich would have enough and the poor nothing. Various methods have been tried in the effort to get rid of specu-

lators, whose high profits naturally decrease the willingness of the villages to sell bread at less abnormal rates. But as a Communist said to me, "There is only one way to get rid of speculation, and that is to supply enough on the card system. When people can buy all they want at 1 rouble 20 they are not going to pay an extra 14 roubles for the encouragement of speculators." "And when will you be able to do that?" I asked. "As soon as the war ends, and we can use our transport for peaceful purposes."

There can be no question about the starvation of Moscow. On the third day after my arrival in Moscow I saw a man driving a sledge laden with, I think, horseflesh, mostly bones, probably dead sledge horses. As he drove a black crowd of crows followed the sledge and perched on it, tearing greedily at the meat. He beat at them continually with his whip, but they were so famished that they took no notice whatever. The starving crows used even to force their way through the small ventilators of the windows in my hotel to pick up any scraps they could find inside. The pigeons, which formerly crowded the streets, ut-

terly undismayed by the traffic, confident in the security given by their supposed connection with religion, have completely disappeared.

Nor can there be any question about the cold. I resented my own sufferings less when I found that the State Departments were no better off than other folk. Even in the Kremlin I found the Keeper of the Archives sitting at work in an old sheepskin coat and felt boots, rising now and then to beat vitality into his freezing hands like a London cabman of old times.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON THE REPLY TO THE PRINKIPO PRO- POSAL

February 10th.

It will be remembered that a proposal was made by the Peace Conference that the various *de facto* governments of Russia should meet on an island in the Bosphorus to discuss matters, an armistice being arranged meanwhile. No direct invitation was sent to the Soviet Government. After attempting to obtain particulars through the editor of a French socialist paper, Chicherin on February 4th sent a long note to the Allies. The note was not at first considered with great favour in Russia, although it was approved by the opposition parties on the right, the Mensheviks even going so far as to say that in sending such a note, the Bolsheviks were acting in the interest of the whole of the Russian people. The opposition on the

left complained that it was a betrayal of the revolution into the hands of the Entente, and there were many Bolsheviks who said openly that they thought it went a little too far in the way of concession. On February 10th, the Executive Committee met to consider the international position.

Before proceeding to an account of that meeting, it will be well to make a short summary of the note in question. Chicherin, after referring to the fact that no invitation had been addressed to them and that the absence of a reply from them was being treated as the rejection of a proposal they had never received, said that in spite of its more and more favourable position, the Russian Soviet Government considered a cessation of hostilities so desirable that it was ready immediately to begin negotiations, and, as it had more than once declared, to secure agreement "even at the cost of serious concessions in so far as these should not threaten the development of the Republic." "Taking into consideration that the enemies against whom it has to struggle borrow their strength of resistance exclusively from the help shown them by the powers of the Entente, and

that therefore these powers are the only actual enemy of the Russian Soviet Government, the latter addresses itself precisely to the powers of the Entente, setting out the points on which it considers such concessions possible with a view to the ending of every kind of conflict with the aforesaid powers." There follows a list of the concessions they are prepared to make. The first of these is recognition of their debts, the interest on which, "in view of Russia's difficult financial position and her unsatisfactory credit," they propose to guarantee in raw materials. Then, "in view of the interest continually expressed by foreign capital in the question of the exploitation for its advantage of the natural resources of Russia, the Soviet Government is ready to give to subjects of the powers of the Entente mineral, timber and other concessions, to be defined in detail, on condition that the economic and social structure of Soviet Russia shall not be touched by the internal arrangements of these concessions." The last point is that which roused most opposition. It expresses a willingness to negotiate even concerning such annexations, hidden or open, as the Allies

may have in mind. The words used are "The Russian Soviet Government has not the intention of excluding at all costs consideration of the question of annexations, etc. . . ." Then, "by annexations must be understood the retention on this or that part of the territory of what was the Russian Empire, not including Poland and Finland, of armed forces of the Entente or of such forces as are maintained by the governments of the Entente or enjoy their financial, military, technical or other support." There follows a statement that the extent of the concessions will depend on the military position. Chicherin proceeds to give a rather optimistic account of the external and internal situation. Finally he touches on the question of propaganda. "The Russian Soviet Government, while pointing out that it cannot limit the freedom of the revolutionary press, declares its readiness, in case of necessity, to include in the general agreement with the powers of the Entente the obligation not to interfere in their internal affairs." The note ends thus: "On the foregoing bases the Russian Soviet Government is ready immediately to begin negotiations either

on Prinkipo island or in any other place whatsoever with all the powers of the Entente together or with separate powers of their number, or with any Russian political groupings whatsoever, according to the wishes of the powers of the Entente. The Russian Soviet Government begs the powers of the Entente immediately to inform it whither to send its representatives, and precisely when and by what route." This note was dated February 4th, and was sent out by wireless.

From the moment when the note appeared in the newspapers of February 5th, it had been the main subject of conversation. Every point in it was criticized and counter-criticized, but even its critics, though anxious to preserve their criticism as a basis for political action afterwards, were desperately anxious that it should meet with a reply. No one in Moscow at that time could have the slightest misgiving about the warlike tendencies of the revolution. The overwhelming mass of the people and of the revolutionary leaders want peace, and only continued warfare forced upon them could turn their desire for peace into desperate, resentful aggression. Everywhere I heard

the same story: "We cannot get things straight while we have to fight all the time." They would not admit it, I am sure, but few of the Soviet leaders who have now for eighteen months been wrestling with the difficulties of European Russia have not acquired, as it were in spite of themselves, a national, domestic point of view. They are thinking less about world revolution than about getting bread to Moscow, or increasing the output of textiles, or building river power-stations to free the northern industrial district from its dependence on the distant coal-fields. I was consequently anxious to hear what the Executive Committee would have to say, knowing that there I should listen to some expression of the theoretical standpoint from which my hard-working friends had been drawn away by interests nearer home.

The Executive Committee met as usual in the big hall of the Hotel Metropole, and it met as usual very late. The sitting was to begin at seven, and, foolishly thinking that Russians might have changed their nature in the last six months, I was punctual and found the hall nearly empty,

because a party meeting of the Communists in the room next door was not finished. The hall looked just as it used to look, with a red banner over the præsidium and another at the opposite end, both inscribed "The All Russian Executive Committee," "Proletariat of all lands, unite," and so on. As the room gradually filled, I met many acquaintances.

Old Professor Pokrovsky came in, blinking through his spectacles, bent a little, in a very old coat, with a small black fur hat, his hands clasped together, just as, so I have been told, he walked unhappily to and fro in the fortress at Brest during the second period of the negotiations. I did not think he would recognize me, but he came up at once, and reminded me of the packing of the archives at the time when it seemed likely that the Germans would take Petrograd. He told me of a mass of material they are publishing about the origin of the war. He said that England came out of it best of anybody, but that France and Russia showed in a very bad light.

Just then, Demian Biedny rolled in, fatter than he used to be (admirers from the country send him

food) with a round face, shrewd laughing eyes, and cynical mouth, a typical peasant, and the poet of the revolution. He was passably shaved, his little yellow moustache was trimmed, he was wearing new leather breeches, and seemed altogether a more prosperous poet than the untidy ruffian I first met about a year or more ago before his satirical poems in *Pravda* and other revolutionary papers had reached the heights of popularity to which they have since attained. In the old days before the revolution in Petrograd he used to send his poems to the revolutionary papers. A few were published and scandalized the more austere and serious-minded revolutionaries, who held a meeting to decide whether any more were to be printed. Since the revolution, he has rapidly come into his own, and is now a sort of licensed jester, flagellating Communists and non-Communists alike. Even in this assembly he had about him a little of the manner of Robert Burns in Edinburgh society. He told me with expansive glee that they had printed two hundred and fifty thousand of his last book, that the whole edition was sold in two weeks, and that he had had

his portrait painted by a real artist. It is actually true that of his eighteen different works, only two are obtainable to-day.

Madame Radek, who last year showed a genius for the making of sandwiches with chopped leeks, and did good work for Russia as head of the Committee for dealing with Russian war prisoners, came and sat down beside me, and complained bitterly that the authorities wanted to turn her out of the grand ducal apartments in the Kremlin and make them into a historical museum to illustrate the manner of life of the Romanovs. She said she was sure that was simply an excuse and that the real reason was that Madame Trotsky did not like her having a better furnished room than her own. It seems that the Trotskys, when they moved into the Kremlin, chose a lodging extremely modest in comparison with the gorgeous place where I had found Madame Radek.

All this time the room was filling, as the party meeting ended and the members of the Executive Committee came in to take their places. I was asking Litvinov whether he was going to speak, when a little hairy energetic man came up and

with great delight showed us the new matches invented in the Soviet laboratories. Russia is short of match-wood, and without paraffin. Besides which I think I am right in saying that the bulk of the matches used in the north came from factories in Finland. In these new Bolshevik matches neither wood nor paraffin is used. Waste paper is a substitute for one, and the grease that is left after cleaning wool is a substitute for the other. The little man, Berg, secretary of the Præsidium of the Council of Public Economy, gave me a packet of his matches. They are like the matches in a folding cover that used to be common in Paris. You break off a match before striking it. They strike and burn better than any matches I have ever bought in Russia, and I do not see why they should not be made in England, where we have to import all the materials of which ordinary matches are made. I told Berg I should try to patent them and so turn myself into a capitalist. Another Communist, who was listening, laughed, and said that most fortunes were founded in just such a fraudulent way.

Then there was Steklov of the *Izvestia*, Ma-

dame Kollontai, and a lot of other people whose names I do not remember. Little Bucharin, the editor of *Pravda* and one of the most interesting talkers in Moscow, who is ready to discuss any philosophy you like, from Berkeley and Locke down to Bergson and William James, trotted up and shook hands. Suddenly a most unexpected figure limped through the door. This was the lame Eliava of the Vologda Soviet, who came up in great surprise at seeing me again, and reminded me how Radek and I, hungry from Moscow, astonished the hotel of the Golden Anchor by eating fifteen eggs apiece, when we came to Vologda last summer (I acted as translator during Radek's conversations with the American Ambassador and Mr. Lindley). Eliava is a fine, honest fellow, and had a very difficult time in Vologda where the large colony of foreign embassies and missions naturally became the centre of disaffection in a district which at the time was full of inflammable material. I remember when we parted from him, Radek said to me that he hardly thought he would see him alive again. He told me he had left Vologda some three months ago and was now going

to Turkestan. He did not disguise the resentment he felt towards M. Noulens (the French Ambassador) who, he thought, had stood in the way of agreement last year, but said that he had nothing whatever to say against Lindley.

At last there was a little stir in the raised præsidium, and the meeting began. When I saw the lean, long-haired Avanesov take his place as secretary, and Sverdlov, the president, lean forward a little, ring his bell, and announce that the meeting was open and that "Comrade Chicherin has the word," I could hardly believe that I had been away six months.

Chicherin's speech took the form of a general report on the international situation. He spoke a little more clearly than he was used to do, but even so I had to walk round to a place close under the tribune before I could hear him. He sketched the history of the various steps the Soviet Government has taken in trying to secure peace, even including such minor "peace offensives" as Litvinov's personal telegram to President Wilson. He then weighed, in no very hopeful spirit, the possibilities of this last Note to all the Allies having any seri-

ous result. He estimated the opposing tendencies for and against war with Russia in each of the principal countries concerned. The growth of revolutionary feeling abroad made imperialistic governments even more aggressive towards the Workers' and Peasants' Republic than they would otherwise be. It was now making their intervention difficult, but no more. It was impossible to say that the collapse of Imperialism had gone so far that it had lost its teeth. Chicherin speaks as if he were a dead man or a ventriloquist's lay figure. And indeed he is half-dead. He has never learnt the art of releasing himself from drudgery by handing it over to his subordinates. He is permanently tired out. You feel it is almost cruel to say "Good morning" to him when you meet him, because of the appeal to be left alone that comes unconsciously into his eyes. Partly in order to avoid people, partly because he is himself accustomed to work at night, his section of the foreign office keeps extraordinary hours, is not to be found till about five in the afternoon and works till four in the morning. The actual material of his report was interesting, but there was nothing in its man-

ner to rouse enthusiasm of any kind. The audience listened with attention, but only woke into real animation when with a shout of laughter it heard an address sent to Clémenceau by the emigré financiers, aristocrats and bankrupt politicians of the Russian colony in Stockholm, protesting against any sort of agreement with the Bolsheviks.

Bucharin followed Chicherin. A little eager figure in his neat brown clothes (bought, I think, while visiting Berlin as a member of the Economic Commission), he at least makes himself clearly heard, though his voice has a funny tendency to breaking. He compared the present situation with the situation before Brest. He had himself (as I well remember) been with Radek, one of the most violent opponents of the Brest peace, and he now admitted that at that time Lenin had been right and he wrong. The position was now different, because whereas then imperialism was split into two camps fighting each other, it now showed signs of uniting its forces. He regarded the League of Nations as a sort of capitalist syndicate, and said that the difference in the French and American attitude towards the League depended upon the

position of French and American capital. Capital in France was so weak, that she could at best be only a small shareholder. Capital in America was in a very advantageous position. America therefore wanted a huge All-European syndicate in which each state would have a certain number of shares. America, having the greatest number of shares, would be able to exploit all the other nations. This is a fixed idea of Bucharin's, and he has lost no opportunity of putting out this theory of the League of Nations since the middle of last summer. As for Chicherin's Note, he said it had at least great historical interest on account of the language it used, which was very different from the hypocritical language of ordinary diplomacy. Here were no phrases about noble motives, but a plain recognition of the facts of the case. "Tell us what you want," it says, "and we are ready to buy you off, in order to avoid armed conflict." Even if the Allies gave no answer the Note would still have served a useful purpose and would be a landmark in history.

Litvinov followed Bucharin. A solid, jolly, round man, with his peaked grey fur hat on his

head, rounder than ever in fur-collared, thick coat, his eye-glasses slipping from his nose as he got up, his grey muffler hanging from his neck, he hurried to the tribune. Taking off his things and leaving them on a chair below, he stepped up into the tribune with his hair all rumpled, a look of extreme seriousness on his face, and spoke with a voice whose capacity and strength astonished me who had not heard him speak in public before. He spoke very well, with more sequence than Bucharin, and much vitality, and gave his summary of the position abroad. He said (and Lenin expressed the same view to me afterwards) that the hostility of different countries to Soviet Russia varied in direct proportion to their fear of revolution at home. Thus France, whose capital had suffered most in the war and was weakest, was the most uncompromising, while America, whose capital was in a good position, was ready for agreement. England, with rather less confidence, he thought was ready to follow America. Need of raw material was the motive tending towards agreement with Russia. Fear that the mere existence of a Labour Government anywhere in the

world strengthens the revolutionary movement elsewhere, was the motive for the desire to wipe out the Soviet at all cost. Chicherin's note, he thought, would emphasize the difference between these opposing views and would tend to make impossible an alliance of the capitalists against Russia.

Finally, Kamenev, now President of the Moscow Soviet, spoke, objecting to Bucharin's comparison of the peace now sought with that of Brest Litovsk. Then everything was in a state of experiment and untried. Now it was clear to the world that the unity of Russia could be achieved only under the Soviets. The powers opposed to them could not but recognize this fact. Some parts of Russia (Ukraine) had during the last fifteen months experienced every kind of government, from the Soviets, the dictatorship of the proletariat, to the dictatorship of foreign invaders and the dictatorship of a General of the old régime, and they had after all returned to the Soviets. Western European imperialists must realize that the only Government in Russia which rested on

the popular masses was the Government of the Soviets and no other. Even the paper of the Mensheviks, commenting on Chicherin's note, had declared that by this step the Soviet Government had shown that it was actually a national Government acting in the interests of the nation. He further read a statement by Right Social Revolutionaries (delegates of that group, members of the Constituent Assembly, were in the gallery) to the effect that they were prepared to help the Soviet Government as the only Government in Russia that was fighting against a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Finally, the Committee unanimously passed a resolution approving every step taken in trying to obtain peace, and at the same time "sending a fraternal greeting to the Red Army of workers and peasants engaged in ensuring the independence of Soviet Russia." The meeting then turned to talk of other things.

I left, rather miserable to think how little I had foreseen when Soviet Russia was compelled last year to sign an oppressive peace with Germany,

that the time would come when they would be trying to buy peace from ourselves. As I went out I saw another unhappy figure, unhappy for quite different reasons. Angelica Balabanova, after dreaming all her life of socialism in the most fervent Utopian spirit, had come at last to Russia to find that a socialist state was faced with difficulties at least as real as those which confront other states, that in the battle there was little sentiment and much cynicism, and that dreams worked out in terms of humanity in the face of the opposition of the whole of the rest of the world are not easily recognized by their dreamers. Poor little Balabanova, less than five feet high, in a black coat that reached to her feet but did not make her look any taller, was wandering about like a lost and dejected spirit. Not so, she was thinking, should socialists deal with their enemies. Somehow, but not so. Had the silver trumpets blown seven times in vain, and was it really necessary to set to work and, stone by stone, with bleeding hands, level the walls of Jericho?

There was snow falling as I walked home. Two workmen, arguing, were walking in front of

me. "If only it were not for the hunger," said one. "But will that ever change?" said the other.

KAMENEV AND THE MOSCOW SOVIET

February 11th.

LITVINOV has been unlucky in his room in the Metropole. It is small, dark and dirty, and colder than mine. He was feeling ill and his chest was hurting him, perhaps because of his speech last night; but while I was there Kamenev rang him up on the telephone, told him he had a car below, and would he come at once to the Moscow Soviet to speak on the international situation? Litvinov tried to excuse himself, but it was no use, and he said to me that if I wanted to see Kamenev I had better come along. We found Kamenev in the hall, and after a few minutes in a little Ford car we were at the Moscow Soviet. The Soviet meets in the small lecture theatre of the old Polytechnic. When we arrived, a party meeting was going on, and Kamenev, Litvinov, and I went behind the stage to a little empty room, where we

were joined by a member of the Soviet whose name I forget.

It was Kamenev's first talk with Litvinov after his return, and I think they forgot that I was there. Kamenev asked Litvinov what he meant to do, and Litvinov told him he wished to establish a special department of control to receive all complaints, to examine into the efficiency of different commissariats, to get rid of parallelism, etc., and, in fact, to be the most unpopular department in Moscow. Kamenev laughed. "You need not think you are the first to have that idea. Every returning envoy without exception has the same. Coming back from abroad they notice more than we do the inefficiencies here, and at once think they will set everything right. Rakovsky sat here for months dreaming of nothing else. Joffe was the same when he came back from that tidy Berlin. Now you; and when Vorovsky comes (Vorovsky was still in Petrograd) I am ready to wager that he too has a scheme for general control waiting in his pocket. The thing cannot be done. The only way is, when something obviously needs doing, to put in some one we can trust to get it done. Soap

is hard to get. Good. Establish a commission and soap instantly disappears. But put in one man to see that soap is forthcoming, and somehow or other we get it."

"Where is the soap industry concentrated?"

"There are good factories, well equipped, here, but they are not working, partly for lack of material and partly, perhaps, because some crazy fool imagined that to take an inventory you must bring everything to a standstill."

Litvinov asked him what he thought of the position as a whole. He said good, if only transport could be improved; but before the public of Moscow could feel an appreciable improvement it would be necessary that a hundred wagons of foodstuffs should be coming in daily. At present there are seldom more than twenty. I asked Kamenev about the schools, and he explained that one of their difficulties was due to the militarism forced upon them by external attacks. He explained that the new Red Army soldiers, being mostly workmen, are accustomed to a higher standard of comfort than the old army soldiers, who were mostly peasants. They objected to the

planks which served as beds in the old, abominable, over-crowded and unhealthy barracks. Trotsky, looking everywhere for places to put his darlings, found nothing more suitable than the schools; and, in Kamenev's words, "We have to fight hard for every school." Another difficulty, he said, was the lack of school books. Histories, for example, written under the censorship and in accordance with the principles of the old régime, were now useless, and new ones were not ready, apart from the difficulty of getting paper and of printing. A lot, however, was being done. There was no need for a single child in Moscow to go hungry. 150,000 to 180,000 children got free meals daily in the schools. Over 10,000 pairs of felt boots had been given to children who needed them. The number of libraries had enormously increased. Physically workmen lived in far worse conditions than in 1912, but as far as their spiritual welfare was concerned there could be no comparison. Places like the famous Yar restaurant, where once the rich went to amuse themselves with orgies of feeding and drinking and flirting with gypsies, were now made into working men's

clubs and theatres, where every working man had a right to go. As for the demand for literature from the provinces, it was far beyond the utmost efforts of the presses and the paper stores to supply.

When the party meeting ended, we went back to the lecture room where the members of the Soviet had already settled themselves in their places. I was struck at once by the absence of the general public which in the old days used to crowd the galleries to overflowing. The political excitement of the revolution has passed, and to-day there were no more spectators than are usually to be found in the gallery of the House of Commons. The character of the Soviet itself had not changed. Practically every man sitting on the benches was obviously a workman and keenly intent on what was being said. Litvinov practically repeated his speech of last night, making it, however, a little more demagogic in character, pointing out that after the Allied victory, the only corner of the world not dominated by Allied capital was Soviet Russia.

The Soviet passed a resolution expressing "firm

confidence that the Soviet Government will succeed in getting peace and so in opening a wide road to the construction of a proletarian state." A note was passed up to Kamenev who, glancing at it, announced that the newly elected representative of the Chinese workmen in Moscow wished to speak. This was Chitaya Kuni, a solid little Chinaman with a big head, in black leather coat and breeches. I had often seen him before, and wondered who he was. He was received with great cordiality and made a quiet, rather shy speech in which he told them he was learning from them how to introduce socialism in China, and more compliments of the same sort. Reinstein replied, telling how at an American labour congress some years back the Americans shut the door in the face of a representative of a union of foreign workmen. "Such," he said, "was the feeling in America at the time when Gompers was supreme, but that time has passed." Still, as I listened to Reinstein, I wondered in how many other countries besides Russia, a representative of foreign labour would be thus welcomed. The reason has probably little to do with the good-heartedness of the Russians. Owing to the gen-

eral unification of wages Mr. Kuni could not represent the competition of cheap labour. I talked to the Chinaman afterwards. He is president of the Chinese Soviet. He told me they had just about a thousand Chinese workmen in Moscow, and therefore had a right to representation in the government of the town. I asked about the Chinese in the Red Army, and he said there were two or three thousand, not more.

AN EX-CAPITALIST

February 13th.

I DRANK tea with an old acquaintance from the provinces, a Russian who, before the revolution, owned a leather-bag factory which worked in close connection with his uncle's tannery. He gave me a short history of events at home. The uncle had started with small capital, and during the war had made enough to buy outright the tannery in which he had had shares. The story of his adventures since the October revolution is a very good illustration of the rough and ready way in which theory gets translated into practice. I am writing it, as nearly as possible, as it was told by the nephew.

During the first revolution, that is from March till October 1917, he fought hard against the workmen, and was one of the founders of a Soviet of factory owners, the object of which was to defeat the efforts of the workers' Soviets.¹ This, of

¹ By agreeing upon lock-outs, etc.

course, was smashed by the October Revolution, and "Uncle, after being forced, as a property owner, to pay considerable contributions, watched the newspapers closely, realized that after the nationalization of the banks resistance was hopeless, and resigned himself to do what he could, not to lose his factory altogether."

He called together all the workmen, and proposed that they should form an *artel* or co-operative society and take the factory into their own hands, each man contributing a thousand roubles towards the capital with which to run it. Of course the workmen had not got a thousand roubles apiece, "so uncle offered to pay it in for them, on the understanding that they would eventually pay him back." This was illegal, but the little town was a long way from the centre of things, and it seemed a good way out of the difficulty. He did not expect to get it back, but he hoped in this way to keep control of the tannery, which he wished to develop, having a paternal interest in it.

Things worked very well. They elected a committee of control. "Uncle was elected president, I was elected vice-president, and there were three

workmen. We are working on those lines to this day. They give uncle 1,500 roubles a month, me a thousand, and the bookkeeper a thousand. The only difficulty is that the men will treat uncle as the owner, and this may mean trouble if things go wrong. Uncle is for ever telling them, 'It's your factory, don't call me Master,' and they reply, 'Yes, it's our factory all right, but you are still Master, and that must be.' "

Trouble came fast enough, with the tax levied on the propertied classes. "Uncle," very wisely, had ceased to be a property owner. He had given up his house to the factory, and been allotted rooms in it, as president of the factory Soviet. He was therefore really unable to pay when the people from the District Soviet came to tell him that he had been assessed to pay a tax of sixty thousand roubles. He explained the position. The nephew was also present and joined in the argument, whereupon the tax-collectors consulted a bit of paper and retorted, "A tax of twenty thousand has been assessed on you too. Be so good as to put your coat on."

That meant arrest, and the nephew said he had

five thousand roubles and would pay that, but could pay no more. Would that do?

"Very well," said the tax-collector, "fetch it."

The nephew fetched it.

"And now put your coat on."

"But you said it would be all right if I paid the five thousand!"

"That's the only way to deal with people like you. We recognize that your case is hard, and we dare say that you will get off. But the Soviet has told us to collect the whole tax or the people who refuse to pay it, and they have decreed that if we came back without one or the other, we shall go to prison ourselves. You can hardly expect us to go and sit in prison out of pity for you. So on with your coat and come along."

They went, and at the militia headquarters were shut into a room with barred windows where they were presently joined by most of the other rich men of the town, all in a rare state of indignation, and some of them very angry with "Uncle," for taking things so quietly. "Uncle was worrying about nothing in the world but the tannery and the leather-works which he was afraid might get

into difficulties now that both he and I were under lock and key."

The plutocracy of the town being thus gathered in the little room at the militia-house, their wives came, timorously at first, and chattered through the windows. My informant, being unmarried, sent word to two or three of his friends, in order that he might not be the only one without some one to talk with outside. The noise was something prodigious, and the head of the militia finally ran out into the street and arrested one of the women, but was so discomfited when she removed her shawl and he recognized her as his hostess at a house where he had been billeted as a soldier that he hurriedly let her go. The extraordinary parliament between the rich men of the town and their wives and friends, like a crowd of hoodie crows, chattering outside the window, continued until dark.

Next day the workmen from the tannery came to the militia-house and explained that "Uncle" had really ceased to be a member of the propertied classes, that he was necessary to them as president of their soviet, and that they were willing to secure

his release by paying half of the tax demanded from him out of the factory funds. Uncle got together thirty thousand, the factory contributed another thirty, and he was freed, being given a certificate that he had ceased to be an exploiter or a property owner, and would in future be subject only to such taxes as might be levied on the working population. The nephew was also freed, on the grounds that he was wanted at the leather-works.

I asked him how things were going on. He said, "Fairly well, only uncle keeps worrying because the men still call him 'Master.' Otherwise, he is very happy because he has persuaded the workmen to set aside a large proportion of the profits for developing the business and building a new wing to the tannery."

"Do the men work?"

"Well," he said, "we thought that when the factory was in their own hands they would work better, but we do not think they do so, not noticeably, anyhow."

"Do they work worse?"

"No, that is not noticeable either."

I tried to get at his political views. Last summer he had told me that the Soviet Government could not last more than another two or three months. He was then looking forward to its downfall. Now he did not like it any better, but he was very much afraid of war being brought into Russia, or rather of the further disorders which war would cause. He took a queer sort of pride in the way in which the territory of the Russian republic was gradually resuming its old frontiers. "In the old days no one ever thought the Red Army would come to anything," he said. "You can't expect much from the Government, but it does keep order, and I can do my work and rub along all right." It was quite funny to hear him in one breath grumbling at the revolution and in the next anxiously asking whether I did not think they had weathered the storm, so that there would be no more disorders.

Knowing that in some country places there had been appalling excesses, I asked him how the Red Terror that followed the attempt on the life of Lenin had shown itself in their district. He laughed.

“We got off very cheaply,” he said. “This is what happened. A certain rich merchant’s widow had a fine house, with enormous stores of all kinds of things, fine knives and forks, and too many of everything. For instance, she had twenty-two samovars of all sizes and sorts. Typical merchant’s house, so many tablecloths that they could not use them all if they lived to be a hundred. Well, one fine day, early last summer, she was told that her house was wanted and that she must clear out. For two days she ran hither and thither trying to get out of giving it up. Then she saw it was no good, and piled all those things, samovars and knives and forks and dinner services and tablecloths and overcoats (there were over a dozen fur overcoats) in the garrets which she closed and sealed, and got the president of the Soviet to come and put his seal also. In the end things were so friendly that he even put a sentinel there to see that the seal should not be broken. Then came the news from Petrograd and Moscow about the Red terror, and the Soviet, after holding a meeting and deciding that it ought to do something, and being on too good terms with all of us to do any-

thing very bad, suddenly remembered poor Maria Nicolaevna's garrets. They broke the seals and tumbled out all the kitchen things, knives, forks, plates, furniture, the twenty-two samovars and the overcoats, took them in carts to the Soviet and declared them national property. National property! And a week or two later there was a wedding of a daughter of one of the members of the Soviet, and somehow or other the knives and forks were on the table, and as for samovars, there were enough to make tea for a hundred."

A THEORIST OF REVOLUTION

February 13th.

AFTER yesterday's talk with a capitalist victim of the revolution, I am glad for the sake of contrast to set beside it a talk with one of the revolution's chief theorists. The leather-worker illustrated the revolution as it affects an individual. The revolutionary theorist was quite incapable of even considering his own or any other individual interests and thought only in terms of enormous movements in which the experiences of an individual had only the significance of the adventures of one ant among a myriad. Bucharin, member of the old economic mission to Berlin, violent opponent of the Brest peace, editor of *Pravda*, author of many books on economics and revolution, indefatigable theorist, found me drinking tea at a table in the Metropole.

I had just bought a copy of a magazine which

contained a map of the world, in which most of Europe was coloured red or pink for actual or potential revolution. I showed it to Bucharin and said, "You cannot be surprised that people abroad talk of you as of the new Imperialists."

Bucharin took the map and looked at it.

"Idiotism, rank idiotism!" he said. "At the same time," he added, "I do think we have entered upon a period of revolution which may last fifty years before the revolution is at last victorious in all Europe and finally in all the world."

Now, I have a stock theory which I am used to set before revolutionaries of all kinds, nearly always with interesting results. (See p. 118.) I tried it on Bucharin. I said:—

"You people are always saying that there will be revolution in England. Has it not occurred to you that England is a factory and not a granary, so that in the event of revolution we should be immediately cut off from all food supplies. According to your own theories, English capital would unite with American in ensuring that within six weeks the revolution had nothing to eat. England is not a country like Russia where you can

feed yourselves somehow or other by simply walking to where there is food. Six weeks would see starvation and reaction in England. I am inclined to think that a revolution in England would do Russia more harm than good."

Bucharin laughed. "You old counter-revolutionary!" he said. "That would be all true, but you must look further. You are right in one thing. If the revolution spreads in Europe, America will cut off food supplies. But by that time we shall be getting food from Siberia."

"And is the poor Siberian railway to feed Russia, Germany, and England?"

"Before then Pichon and his friends will have gone. There will be France to feed too. But you must not forget that there are the cornfields of Hungary and Roumania. Once civil war ends in Europe, Europe can feed herself. With English and German engineering assistance we shall soon turn Russia into an effective grain supply for all the working men's republics of the Continent. But even then the task will be only beginning. The moment there is revolution in England, the English colonies will throw themselves eagerly

into the arms of America. Then will come America's turn, and, finally, it is quite likely that we shall all have to combine to overthrow the last stronghold of capitalism in some South African bourgeois republic. I can well imagine," he said, looking far away with his bright little eyes through the walls of the dark dining room, "that the working men's republics of Europe may have to have a colonial policy of an inverse kind. Just as now you conquer backward races in order to exploit them, so in the future you may have to conquer the colonists to take from them the means of exploitation. There is only one thing I am afraid of."

"And what is that?"

"Sometimes I am afraid that the struggle will be so bitter and so long drawn out that the whole of European culture may be trampled under foot."

I thought of my leather-worker of yesterday, one of thousands experiencing in their own persons the appalling discomforts, the turn over and revaluation of all established values that revolution, even without death and civil war, means to the ordinary man; and, being perhaps a little faint-hearted, I finished my tea in silence. Bucharin,

after carelessly opening these colossal perspectives, drank his tea in one gulp, prodigiously sweetened with my saccharin, reminded me of his illness in the summer, when Radek scoured the town for sweets for him, curing him with no other medicine, and then hurried off, fastening his coat as he went, a queer little De Quincey of revolution, to disappear into the dusk, before, half running, half walking, as his way is, he reached the other end of the big dimly lit, smoke-filled dining room.

EFFECTS OF ISOLATION

February 14th.

I HAD a rather grim talk with Meshtcheriakov at dinner. He is an old Siberian exile, who visited England last summer. He is editing a monthly magazine in Moscow, mostly concerned with the problems of reconstruction, and besides that doing a lot of educational work among the labouring classes. He is horrified at the economic position of the country. Isolation, he thinks, is forcing Russia backwards towards a primeval state.

“We simply cannot get things. For example, I am lecturing on mathematics. I have more pupils than I can deal with. They are as greedy for knowledge as sponges for water, and I cannot get even the simplest text-books for them. I cannot even find in the second-hand book stores an old Course of Mathematics from which I could myself make a series of copies for them. I have to teach

like a teacher of the middle ages. But, like him, I have pupils who want to learn."

"In another three years," said some one else at the table, "we shall be living in ruins. Houses in Moscow were always kept well warmed. Lack of transport has brought with it lack of fuel, and water-pipes have burst in thousands of houses. We cannot get what is needed to mend them. In the same way we cannot get paints for the walls, which are accordingly rotting. In another three years we shall have all the buildings of Moscow tumbling about our ears."

Some one else joined in with a laugh: "In ten years we shall be running about on all fours."

"And in twenty we shall begin sprouting tails."

Meshtcheriakov finished his soup and laid down his wooden spoon.

"There is another side to all these things," he said. "In Russia, even if the blockade lasts, we shall get things established again sooner than anywhere else, because we have all the raw materials in our own country. With us it is a question of transport only, and of transport within our own borders. In a few years, I am convinced, in spite

of all that is working against us, Russia will be a better place to live in than anywhere else in Europe. But we have a bad time to go through. And not we alone. The effects of the war are scarcely visible as yet in the west, but they will become visible. Humanity has a period of torment before it. . . .”

“Bucharin says fifty years,” I said, referring to my talk of yesterday.

“Maybe. I think less than that. But the revolution will be far worse for you nations of the west than it has been for us. In the west, if there is revolution, they will use artillery at once, and wipe out whole districts. The governing classes in the west are determined and organized in a way our home-grown capitalists never were. The Autocracy never allowed them to organize, so, when the Autocracy itself fell, our task was comparatively easy. There was nothing in the way. It will not be like that in Germany.”

AN EVENING AT THE OPERA

I READ in one of the newspapers that a member of the American Commission in Berlin reasoned from the fact that the Germans were crowding to theatres and spectacles that they could not be hungry. There can be no question about the hunger of the people of Moscow, but the theatres are crowded, and there is such demand for seats that speculators acquire tickets in the legitimate way and sell them illicitly near the doors of the theatre to people who have not been able to get in, charging, of course, double the price or even more. Interest in the theatre, always keen in Moscow, seems to me to have rather increased than decreased. There is a School of Theatrical Production, with lectures on every subject connected with the stage, from stage carpentry upwards. A Theatrical Bulletin is published three times weekly, containing the programmes of all the theatres and occasional articles

on theatrical subjects. I had been told in Stockholm that the Moscow theatres were closed. The following is an incomplete list of the plays and spectacles to be seen at various theatres on February 13 and February 14, copied from the Theatrical Bulletin of those dates. Just as it would be interesting to know what French audiences enjoyed at the time of the French revolution, so I think it worth while to record the character of the entertainments at present popular in Moscow.

Opera at the Great Theatre.—"Sadko" by Rimsky-Korsakov and "Samson and Delilah" by Saint-Saens.

Small State Theatre.—"Besheny Dengi" by Ostrovsky and "Starik" by Gorky.

Moscow Art Theatre.—"The Cricket on the Hearth" by Dickens and "The Death of Pazuchin" by Saltykov-Shtchedrin.

Opera.—"Selo Stepantchiko" and "Coppelia."

People's Palace.—"Dubrovsky" by Napravnik and "Demon" by Rubinstein.

Zamoskvoretzky Theatre.—"Groza" by Ostrovsky and "Meshtchane" by Gorky.

Popular Theatre.—"The Miracle of Saint Anthony" by Maeterlinck.

Komissarzhevskaya Theatre.—"A Christmas Carol" by Dickens and "The Accursed Prince" by Remizov.

Korsh Theatre.—"Much Ado about Nothing" by Shakespeare and "Le Misanthrope" and "Georges Dandin" by Molière.

Dramatic Theatre.—"Alexander I" by Merezhkovsky.

Theatre of Drama and Comedy.—"Little Dorrit" by Dickens and "The King's Barber" by Lunacharsky.

Besides these, other theatres were playing K. R. (Konstantin Romanov), Ostrovsky, Potapenko, Vinitchenko, etc. The two Studios of the Moscow Art Theatre were playing "Rosmersholm" and a repertoire of short plays. They, like the Art Theatre Company, occasionally play in the suburban theatres when their place at home is taken by other performers.

I went to the Great State Theatre to Saint-Saens' "Samson and Delilah." I had a seat in the

box close above the orchestra, from which I could obtain a view equally good of the stage and of the house. Indeed, the view was rather better of the house than of the stage. But that was as I had wished, for the house was what I had come to see.

It had certainly changed greatly since the pre-revolutionary period. The Moscow plutocracy of bald merchants and bejewelled fat wives had gone. Gone with them were evening dresses and white shirt fronts. The whole audience was in the monotone of everyday clothes. The only contrast was given by a small group of Tartar women in the dress circle, who were shawled in white over head and shoulders, in the Tartar fashion. There were many soldiers, and numbers of men who had obviously come straight from their work. There were a good many grey and brown woollen jerseys about, and people were sitting in overcoats of all kinds and ages, for the theatre was very cold. (This, of course, was due to lack of fuel, which may in the long run lead to a temporary stoppage of the theatres if electricity cannot be spared for lighting them.) The orchestra was also variously dressed. Most of the players of brass instruments

had evidently been in regimental bands during the war, and still retained their khaki-green tunics with a very mixed collection of trousers and breeches. Others were in every kind of everyday clothes. The conductor alone wore a frock coat, and sat in his place like a specimen from another age, isolated in fact by his smartness alike from his ragged orchestra and from the stalls behind him.

I looked carefully to see the sort of people who fill the stalls under the new régime, and decided that there has been a general transfer of brains from the gallery to the floor of the house. The same people who in the old days scraped kopecks and waited to get a good place near the ceiling now sat where formerly were the people who came here to digest their dinners. Looking from face to face that night I thought there were very few people in the theatre who had had anything like a good dinner to digest. But, as for their keenness, I can imagine few audiences to which, from the actor's point of view, it would be better worth while to play. Applause, like brains, had come down from the galleries.

Of the actual performance I have little to say except that ragged clothes and empty stomachs seemed to make very little difference to the orchestra. Helzer, the ballerina, danced as well before this audience as ever before the bourgeoisie. As I turned up the collar of my coat I reflected that the actors deserved all the applause they got for their heroism in playing in such cold. Now and then during the evening I was unusually conscious of the unreality of opera generally, perhaps because of the contrast in magnificence between the stage and the shabby, intelligent audience. Now and then, on the other hand, stage and audience seemed one and indivisible. For "Samson and Delilah" is itself a poem of revolution, and gained enormously by being played by people every one of whom had seen something of the sort in real life. Samson's stirring up of the Israelites reminded me of many scenes in Petrograd in 1917, and when, at last, he brings the temple down in ruins on his triumphant enemies, I was reminded of the words attributed to Trotsky:—"If we are, in the end, forced to go, we shall slam the door behind us in such a way that the echo shall be felt throughout the world."

Going home afterwards through the snow, I did not see a single armed man. A year ago the streets were deserted after ten in the evening except by those who, like myself, had work which took them to meetings and such things late at night. They used to be empty except for the military pickets round their log-fires. Now they were full of foot-passengers going home from the theatres, utterly forgetful of the fact that only twelve months before they had thought the streets of Moscow unsafe after dark. There could be no question about it. The revolution is settling down, and people now think of other matters than the old question, will it last one week or two?

THE COMMITTEE OF STATE CONSTRUCTIONS

February 15th.

I WENT by appointment to see Pavlovitch, President of the Committee of State Constructions. It was a very jolly morning and the streets were crowded. As I walked through the gate into the Red Square I saw the usual crowd of peasant women at the little chapel of the Iberian Virgin, where there was a blaze of candles. On the wall of what used, I think, to be the old town hall, close by the gate, some fanatic agnostic has set a white inscription on a tablet, "Religion is opium for the People." The tablet, which has been there a long time, is in shape not unlike the customary frame for a sacred picture. I saw an old peasant, evidently unable to read, cross himself solemnly before the chapel, and then, turning to the left, cross himself as solemnly before this anti-religious in-

scription. It is perhaps worth while to remark in passing that the new Communist programme, while insisting, as before, on the definite separation of church and state, and church and school, now includes the particular statement that "care should be taken in no way to hurt the feelings of the religious." Churches and chapels are open, church processions take place as before, and Moscow, as in the old days, is still a city of church bells.

A long line of sledges with welcome bags of flour was passing through the square. Soldiers of the Red Army were coming off parade, laughing and talking, and very noticeably smarter than the men of six months ago. There was a bright clear sky behind the fantastic Cathedral of St. Basil, and the rough graves under the Kremlin wall, where those are buried who died in the fighting at the time of the November Revolution, have been tidied up. There was scaffolding round the gate of the Kremlin which was damaged at that time and is being carefully repaired.

The Committee of State Constructions was founded last spring to co-ordinate the management of the various engineering and other con-

structive works previously carried on by independent departments. It became an independent organ with its own finances about the middle of the summer. Its headquarters are in the Nikolskaya, in the Chinese town, next door to the old building of the Anglo-Russian Trading Company, which still bears the Lion and the Unicorn sculptured above its green and white façade some time early in the seventeenth century.

Pavlovitch is a little, fat, spectacled man with a bald head, fringed with the remains of red hair, and a little reddish beard. He was dressed in a black leather coat and trousers. He complained bitterly that all his plans for engineering works to improve the productive possibilities of the country were made impracticable by the imperious demands of war. As an old Siberian exile he had been living in France before the revolution and, as he said, had seen there how France made war. "They sent her locomotives, and rails for the locomotives to run on, everything she needed they sent her from all parts of the world. When they sent horses, they sent also hay for their food, and shoes for their feet, and even nails for the shoes. If we

were supplied like that, Russia would be at peace in a week. But we have nothing, and can get nothing, and are forced to be at war against our will.

“And war spoils everything,” he continued. “This committee should be at work on affairs of peace, making Russia more useful to herself and to the rest of the world. You know our plans. But with fighting on all our fronts, and with all our best men away, we are compelled to use ninety per cent. of our energy and material for the immediate needs of the army. Every day we get masses of telegrams from all fronts, asking for this or that. For example, Trotsky telegraphs here simply “We shall be in Orenburg in two days,” leaving us to do what is necessary. Then with the map before me, I have to send what will be needed, no matter what useful work has to be abandoned meanwhile, engineers, railway gangs for putting right the railways, material for bridges, and so on.

“Indeed, the biggest piece of civil engineering done in Russia for many years was the direct result of our fear lest you people or the Germans should

take our Baltic fleet. Save the dreadnoughts we could not, but I decided to save what we could. The widening and deepening of the canal system so as to shift boats from the Baltic to the Volga had been considered in the time of the Tzar. It was considered and dismissed as impracticable. Once, indeed, they did try to take two torpedo-boats over, and they lifted them on barges to make the attempt. Well, we said that as the thing could be planned, it could be done, and the canals are deepened and widened, and we took through them, under their own power, seven big destroyers, six small destroyers and four submarine boats, which, arriving unexpectedly before Kazan, played a great part in our victory there. But the pleasure of that was spoilt for me by the knowledge that I had had to take men and material from the building of the electric power station, with which we hope to make Petrograd independent of the coal supply.

“The difficulties we have to fight against are, of course, enormous, but much of what the old régime failed to do, for want of initiative or for other reasons, we have done and are doing. Some of

the difficulties are of a most unexpected kind. The local inhabitants, partly, no doubt, under the influence of our political opponents, were extremely hostile with regard to the building of the power station, simply because they did not understand it. I went there myself, and explained to them what it would mean, that their river would become a rich river, that they would be able to get cheap power for all sorts of works, and that they would have electric light in all their houses. Then they carried me shoulder high through the village, and sent telegrams to Lenin, to Zinoviev, to everybody they could think of, and since then we have had nothing but help from them.

“Most of our energy at present has to be spent on mending and making railways and roads for the use of the army. Over 11,000 versts of railway are under construction, and we have finished the railway from Arzamas to Shikhran. Twelve hundred versts of highroad are under construction. And to meet the immediate needs of the army we have already repaired or made 8,000 versts of roads of various kinds. As a matter of fact the

internal railway net of Russia is by no means as bad as people make out. By its means, hampered as we are, we have been able to beat the counter-revolutionaries, concentrating our best troops, now here, now there, wherever need may be. Remember that the whole way round our enormous frontiers we are being forced to fight groups of reactionaries supported at first mostly by the Germans, now mostly by yourselves, by the Roumanians, by the Poles, and in some districts by the Germans still. Troops fighting on the Ural front are fighting a month later south of Voronezh, and a month later again are having a holiday, marching on the heels of the Germans as they evacuate the occupied provinces. Some of our troops are not yet much good. One day they fight, and the next they think they would rather not. So that our best troops, those in which there are most workmen, have to be flung in all directions. We are at work all the time enabling this to be done, and making new roads to enable it to be done still better. But what waste, when there are so many other things we want to do!

“All the time the needs of war are pressing on

us. To-day is the first day for two months that we have been able to warm this building. We have been working here in overcoats and fur hats in a temperature below freezing point. Why? Wood was already on its way to us, when we had suddenly to throw troops northwards. Our wood had to be flung out of the wagons, and the Red Army put in its place, and the wagons sent north again. The thing had to be done, and we have had to work as best we could in the cold. Many of my assistants have fallen ill. Two only yesterday had to be taken home in a condition something like that of a fit, the result of prolonged sedentary work in unheated rooms. I have lost the use of my right hand for the same reason." He stretched out his right hand, which he had been keeping in the pocket of his coat. It was an ugly sight, with swollen, immovable fingers, like the roots of a vegetable.

At this moment some one came in to speak to Pavlovitch. He stood at the table a little behind me, so that I did not see him, but Pavlovitch, noticing that he looked curiously at me, said, "Are you acquaintances?" I looked round and saw

Sukhanov, Gorky's friend, formerly one of the cleverest writers on the *Novaya Jizn*. I jumped up and shook hands with him.

"What, have you gone over to the Bolsheviks?" I asked.

"Not at all," said Sukhanov, smiling, "but I am working here."

"Sukhanov thinks that we do less harm than anybody else," said Pavlovitch, and laughed. "Go and talk to him and he'll tell you all there is to be said against us. And there's lots to say."

Sukhanov was an extremely bitter enemy of the Bolsheviks, and was very angry with me when, over a year ago, I told him I was convinced that sooner or later he would be working with them. I told Pavlovitch the story, and he laughed again. "A long time ago," he said, "Sukhanov made overtures to me through Miliutin. I agreed, and everything was settled, but when a note appeared in *Pravda* to say that he was going to work in this Committee, he grew shy, and wrote a contradiction. Miliutin was very angry and asked me to publish the truth. I refused, but wrote on that day in my diary, 'Sukhanov will come.'

Three months later he was already working with us. One day he told me that in the big diary of the revolution which he is writing, and will write very well, he had some special abuse for me. 'I have none for you,' I said, 'but I will show you one page of my own diary,' and I showed him that page, and asked him to look at the date. Sukhanov is an honest fellow, and was bound to come."

He went on with his talk.

"You know, hampered as we are by lack of everything, we could not put up the fight we are putting up against the reactionaries if it were not for the real revolutionary spirit of the people as a whole. The reactionaries have money, munitions, supplies of all kinds, instructors, from outside. We have nothing, and yet we beat them. Do you know that the English have given them tanks? Have you heard that in one place they used gases or something of the kind, and blinded eight hundred men? And yet we win. Why? Because from every town we capture we get new strength. And any town they take is a source of weakness to them, one more town to garrison

